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Single Mothers in the Changing American Family

In the changing American family more single mothers have become more prominent. Single mothers face unique difficulties in comparison to other diverse types of families. Those difficulties and issues of child care, not being paid as much money as their male counterparts, and after working hard all day single mothers have to come home and clock into the second shift which includes taking care of household needs. Pauline Irit Erera who is a professor at the University of Washington School of Social Work and author of What Is A Family, explores the ideas of what women have to deal with by being a single mother. Lynn Olcott, a teacher in upstate New York at the Auburn Correctional Facility, gives an example of a single mothers’ struggle within the form of a personal essay. Tyler Perry, a popular play write, released a movie entitled Good Deeds. In the movie Perry provides a silver scream view of what struggles single mothers face and how they deal with them.

Single mothers face the struggle of finding childcare for their children while they go to work. In the ballad of a single mother, the personal story of a single mother gives testament to difficulty with finding childcare. The protagonist left the care of her children to her neighbors and missed out on significant moments in her children’s lives. Looking back on life she reflects by saying “ I would put my little baby, screaming, into the arms of my neighbor, Rosalyn” (446). In the movie Good Deeds the main character played by Thandie Newton, is forced to take her child to work with her. Her issue of child care subjected her to hide her child while at work. Because of her late hours, she did not want to leave her child alone. Eventually the owner of the company she was working for provided a safe place where her child could play or sleep while she was working.

Single mothers have issues with receiving equal pay or the same pay as the men they work with, but not by their own fault. In What Is A Family, Erera explores the idea that women are not receiving the same pay as men. Erera states that “although paid far less than their male counterparts, an decreasing number of women were now employed and financially independent” (419). An example of this is showed in the Ballad of A single Mother. The speaker speaks about her issues with money as well as other women who have the same issue:

“Money was always a problem. Like most working women, I was underpaid and so where the women who cared fro my children” (446)

She also ends the passage with best wishes for her granddaughter, after success, wage equity (447).

Single mothers also face a reality often spoken of in sociological terms called “second shift”. The second shift refers to the moment when women have clocked out from their paying job and come home to clock into their other job of being homemaker, nurse, caregiver, chef, mediator, or whatever her child or children may need. In the movie Good Deeds the second shift is ever present. The mother in the film always had her child with her. While at work, due to inadequate childcare, she even had to “clock-out” of her job to “clock-in” to her motherhood job to check on her child while on site of her job. In terms of the second shift, in the Ballad of the Single Mother, the protagonist gives a personal account of her second shift. She tells of the various time of when she was at work and children would call the office phone and ask to speak to their mothers with issues of “ broken eggs and broken legs”. She mentions how women had to “clock-in” to second shift while on the paying job also.

In conclusion single motherhood is hard, no doubt about it. The struggles that single women who are also mothers face are not limited to child care issues, equal pay, and second shift, but those are the most prominent.